

Did you know...? Facts about Alaska's Magnificent Migratory Birds!

General

Alaska is home to more than 445 species of birds, most of which are migratory.

Birds from Alaska pass through virtually every other state in the Union (even Hawaii) on the way to their wintering grounds.

Waterfowl

Alaska has 90+ million acres of wetland habitat for use by breeding waterfowl.

About 20% of America's waterfowl nest in Alaska. At least 42 species are known to nest in the state regularly.

More than half of North America's pintail ducks nest in Alaska.

Alaska supports 100% of the world's breeding Tule and Pacific White-Fronted geese, Aleutian, cackling, and dusky Canada geese.

More than 90,000 tundra swans and 13,000 trumpeter swans nest in Alaska

Five species of loons nest in Alaska – Pacific, Arctic, red-throated, yellow-billed and common loons.

Five percent of Alaska's waterfowl travel to Mexico, South America, Asia, or the Pacific Islands.

Landbirds

Alaska has a unique mix of landbirds that is duplicated nowhere else in the world.

Landbirds constitute 51% of all bird species that breed in Alaska (262 species) and Alaska's landbirds include 90 species of songbirds.

Most landbirds (77%, or 103 species) migrate out of Alaska for the winter.

The U.S. breeding ranges of Smith's longspur, McKay bunting and the golden-crowned sparrow are essentially confined to Alaska.

Species that share the same breeding habitat in central Alaska travel to markedly different wintering grounds.

Gray-cheeked thrushes fly south to western Amazon Basin.

Arctic Warblers migrate to Southeast Asia.

White-crowned sparrows pass the winter in southwestern United States.

Willow ptarmigan stay in Alaska all winter.

Like many landbirds that breed in North America, 69 species, or 51% of landbirds that breed in Alaska, migrate to Mexico, Caribbean Islands, or Central and South America. .

No other group of birds that breed in Alaska, including shorebirds, contains as many species that travel outside of the United States to spend the winter.

Nine species of landbirds (7%) that nest in Alaska and migrate to Asia in the winter breed nowhere else in the United States (e.g., bluethroat, white wagtail, and northern wheatear).

Surprisingly, 31 landbird species (23%) choose to spend their winter in Alaska.

Most of Alaska's winter landbird residents are grouse, owls, and woodpeckers (18 species).

The McKay's bunting, a landbird unique to Alaska, leaves its breeding sites on islands in the Bering Sea to pass the winter on the mainland coast of western Alaska.

Raptors

Alaska is recognized nationally as a stronghold for bald eagles, especially in southeast Alaska and many coastal areas.

Gyrfalcons, listed as a CITES species (highly regulated international trade), are common breeders in much of Alaska.

Except for bald eagles and 2 species of threatened/endangered peregrine falcons (American and Arctic), very little is known about raptor populations in Alaska. .

Shorebirds

Alaska has the highest breeding densities of shorebirds in North America.

Because of its size and northerly position, Alaska provides breeding habitat for more shorebird species (66%) than any other state in the U.S.

Seventy-one species of shorebirds have occurred in Alaska; 37 of them, including several unique Beringian species and Old World subspecies, regularly breed in the region.

Alaska is the exclusive host to the world's population of 3 shorebird species and 5 subspecies.

Most of shorebird species in Alaska migrate south of the U.S.-Mexico border and a third migrate to South America or Oceania.

Concentrations of shorebirds at several coastal staging and migratory stopover sites exceed one million birds; on the Copper River Delta alone, five to eight million shorebirds stop to forage and rest each spring.

Up to eight million shorebirds use Prince William Sound annually for migration, breeding, or wintering.

Western sandpipers weigh only 25 grams (less than an ounce) and lay four eggs, weighing 1/3 the female's body weight.

The diet of dunlins consists almost entirely of tiny clams that live in coastal mudflats.

Egg laying by sandpipers in the Arctic is timed so that hatching will occur when the main hatch of insect food also occurs, thus providing the chicks with abundant insect diet. .

The calcium content of the shells of a four-egg sandpiper clutch is greater than the calcium content within an adult female sandpiper.

Some sandpipers in the Arctic ingest lemming teeth as a source of calcium for eggshell formation.

Some plovers, curlew, and tattlers fly non-stop from Hawaii and other Pacific Islands to Alaska in two or three days, a distance of over 3,500 miles.

Shorebirds cruise at speeds of about 50 miles per hour.

Golden plovers gain over 40 grams of fat at their wintering grounds to serve as an energy source for their migration to Alaska so that over 30% of their body weight is fat.

Migrating shorebirds set their clocks by the rise and fall of the tide. Birds feed at night or any time of the day when the tide exposes the mud flats that hold their required source of energy.

Sandpipers are genetically programmed to stop, rest and replenish their energy stores in certain wetlands along the Pacific coast from South America to Alaska.

Western Sandpipers migrate more than 250 miles per day between stop over points along the Pacific coast flyway to Alaska.

Western sandpipers stop to rest, feed and replenish their energy reserves for 3 to 5 days in each stopover point in their migration northward along the Pacific coast of Alaska.

Loons

Anchorage is largest city (in population) in the United States to share lakes with nesting loons.

Loons have been clocked in flight by pilots at up to 90 mph.

All loon species, except red-throated loons, need a long runway of water to take-off for flight.

Loons in Alaska migrate to the coastal waters of the Pacific Ocean during the wintertime to take advantage of the open water where they can float and fish.

Loons are known to reach depths of greater than 200 feet during feeding dives.

Loons are more closely related to gulls than ducks.

Loons are called “divers” in Europe.

Seabirds

Alaska has 35 species of seabirds that try to raise families along its coastline; 8 species of seabirds occur nowhere else in North America and 22 species of seabirds breed nowhere else in the continental United States.

The red-legged kittiwake and crested least auklet nest exclusively in Alaska.

Each year as many as 140,000,000 seabirds feed from the bountiful waters off the coast of Alaska. In the summer, their numbers may equal or exceed the number of seabirds in the remainder of the northern hemisphere.

Many of the nesting seabirds in Alaska have come from thousands of miles away; from the South Pacific or even Antarctica.